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SUBJECT: JAMMEH DERIDES HIPC AND DEBT RELIEF AS "CHICKEN CHANGE"

REFTEL: BANJUL 18

¶1. In response to a journalist's questions concerning The Gambia's new debt relief package (reftel), President Jammeh has derided the package and the Bretton Woods institutions. He described the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative as a disguised apology owed to Africa for years of exploitation by the IMF and World Bank. He characterized the loans previously offered to African nations as extensions of "the exploitation of Africa by the West. Where they stopped exploiting us as a result of our so-called independence, they continue to exploiting us through the Bretton Woods institutions."

¶2. Jammeh railed against the high interest rates on relatively small loans, without taking into account the historical changes in inflation and currency valuations. He said, "They [the institutions] are talking about democracy and human rights and none of them is ready to come to Africa and explain to Africans why they are paying billions of dollars to debt that amounted to only ten million or fifteen million or thirty million at most." He portrayed debt relief as a masked acknowledgement that debt policies were exploitative, and decried the conditions necessary to meet debt relief qualifications: "So they devised HIPC and said these are the things you should do so that we can let you off the hook."

¶3. The President went on to criticize the 43-year period of debt relief involved in the HIPC arrangement. He likened such measures to "chicken change." Jammeh announced that he planned for The Gambia to be a wealthy country in the next ten years, eliminating the need for debt relief and future borrowing.

COMMENT

¶4. Rather than take the opportunity to highlight The Gambia's economic growth and his government's arguably improved fiscal policies, the President decided to continue his tiresome trend of anti-western, Pan-African nationalist, anti-colonialist rhetoric. Such comments from Jammeh do not come as a surprise, but serve only to distract from the GOTG's real economic achievements in recent years. END COMMENT

BACHMAN